

1954

# outposts

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## CONTRIBUTORS

ALAN SILLITOE  
E. L. MAYO  
ALAN ROOK  
TOM WRIGHT  
ERIC NIXON  
CHRISTOPHER LEVISON  
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LAWRENCE LIPTON  
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PHOEBE HESKETH  
JON SILKIN  
ELIZABETH BARTLETT  
B. EVAN OWEN  
ANTHONY NEWMAN  
CARLTON WILLIS  
CHRISTOPHER MORGAN

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EDITED BY HOWARD SERGEANT

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ONE SHILLING AND SIX PENCE



## ALAN SILLITOE

*Left as one dead . . .*

Left as one dead :  
The white net draped  
And her dark hair spread  
On pillows raped beyond repair,  
And her pale head shaped  
In sleepless prayer.

Mosquitoes knife the air  
Like Eumenides erect  
At midnight's wiles,  
Green music plays  
My blood to weeping  
The window a moon elect  
Looks at her sleeping.

My stilled blood prays  
To the white hoofs sound  
And nine stars beat  
On the barren ground :  
The Death-hound runs its course  
On the unpaved street  
And lame, alone, on my horse,

Wind-kissed, star by pilot star,  
I climb on noiseless hoofs  
The long peaks rolling far  
To my mountain roofs.

Cross-legged, my broad veins weeping,  
Spring water falling  
Through moss woven thread,  
My frugal meal the mixing  
Of a young bird bled  
And the dream of her still sleeping  
Whom I left as one dead.

*Spain.*

E. L. MAYO

*Homage to Vincent*

Pass, painter of proud Europe's summer, down  
Mind-twisted ways to Torquemada-brown  
Hecatombs of leaves and summer's end.  
Let grass and clover intermixed with weeds,  
Incise, and the deft, delicate roots of trees

Gather up your wound. The flickering hordes  
Of blackbirds that attacked your ripened grain  
And all those insupportable evergreens  
That whispered at your back have their reward;  
The yoke is lifted from your neckbone.

And that proud Europe that refused an ear  
Slumbers in sorrow on her bloody arm.  
Over the puddles of her abattoirs  
The lean days draw immitigably down.  
But on her fortresses and cold cafés

Your stars, enormous and compassionate,  
Like sunflowers, still undiminished shine;  
And in her glory's late  
Babylonian captivity  
Your lunacy alone ordered her mind.

*U.S.A.*

ALAN ROOK

*Tonight was death's kingdom*

Tonight was death's kingdom.  
Hail hammering your windowpane  
tooth and claw of wild woodbane  
clutch of ivy on the kingdoms of sun.  
Tonight was a wound profound  
on this unexpected dream's dark mystery,  
snow in the air on a Jack Frost ground  
a chapter broken in our history.  
Tonight was death's kingdom.

Tonight was death's kingdom.  
The gay sun at his going down  
slapped a jackknife into his groin  
and clown was alone with unicorn.  
Yes, tonight was sharp set shock  
quick inrush of sudden sorrow  
limpet clutching ebbtide rock.  
I am tired, you said. You said, tomorrow.  
Tonight was death's kingdom.

Tonight was death's kingdom.  
Gulls lamenting waves unborn  
flowers unopen at earth's turn  
rain and hail on the broken dawn.  
I went home to a loud lonely night  
the image of you about my bed  
your no cold on the gathering light.  
I'm tired, dear heart. Tomorrow, you said.  
Go well now. And, I goodnight.  
Tonight was death's quiet kingdom.

### TOM WRIGHT

#### *Interim Report*

The usual rabbit munches at the lawn,  
the bus arrives its usual minute late.  
The usual cat is sitting at the gate,  
wearing its usual coat of white and fawn.  
Everything has an air of going on,  
the hammers hammer and the waiter wait.  
There is no meaning in the time or date.  
This city lost its soul when you were gone.

The places that were you, the coffee stall,  
the station clock, have no identity.  
The moon now wanders up the riverside  
signing the ripples with a listless scrawl.  
Everything still goes on, but aimlessly.  
The day you went away this city died.

## ERIC NIXON

### *No man is an island*

Open the door which is unseen,  
the entrance to the mystery  
dividing all that's mine from me,  
where vice and virtue both are clean,  
for I'm so often where I've been  
that past and future feel but one  
as two sides of a single stone.

Looking outwards cheats the dreamer  
unless he probes beneath the skin  
and finds the unity within,  
which waits expression at his care,  
which being repaired will him repair  
who lifts the hairshirt from the bone,  
most universal when alone.

Seeing others in his mirror,  
in others that self which is his,  
knows that the angel of all this  
is the virtue in each error,  
which holds both after and before  
timeless though untimely shown,  
the sea which runs through every bone.

## CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

### *Landscape with cranes*

Skies that are wrought of iron, arrogant cloud  
Smoulders along the ridge. The land is bled  
Of all its tone and texture, and like a shroud  
Sand swallows wall and stable into the guarded waste,  
Drains every tint from stone, each twisting thread  
Of sap is wrung from the orchard like a mist.  
The trees do not sleep out this winter but are dead.

Take this landscape in its stern perspectives  
Of crane, truck, arc-lamp, and the stalking quiet,  
Find on the lintel how the sea pox thrives  
In thresholds to gardens that we may suppose  
Grew green in shining April, and where leaves ran riot  
Through country summers a bitterer harvest grows.  
Only the green of sea-weed still survives.

But it was winter when the waters came  
And took the year by storm, besieged the land  
To leave the fields no character, no name.  
Each private hearth seems drifted with the sand,  
Becomes anonymous, each common grief's the same.  
Old men will scavenge from the hostile winds  
Some hint of what is gone, some hope in transience.

Now again winter's harsh horizon's ward  
Off the ocean. Angular with masts,  
Scaffold and barrack through the night stand guard  
Over the desert polders. Sand blows its grey  
Lustre into the dawn like frost, and gulls patrol  
The kerkring, where the cross of the past lies broken  
And bewitched with the muddy fingers of dead oak.

### DON GEIGER

#### *Routes*

Our thought like shortening shadows in love's ascent,  
That lightens all the darkness like a sun,  
Turns on itself, as seeds, grown gay, return  
To sober ways from which they have begun.

Like stars that pour their flames in the dry seeds,  
Bright love has flowered thought into a song;  
But soon thought shakes, like sun-struck prophecy,  
Foretelling end of flowers, flame, and song.

Drinking of love our lonely thought grew bright,  
As sun is in the flowers that were seeds;  
And as the suns in glorious gardens form,  
Drunk thought makes constellations of our deeds.

But Love's no longer potion for our thought  
Than flowers stimulate abstaining dead,  
And dizzy singers wake to find bright love  
Setting its flames like wreaths around the head.

Love's flashes burn in brain's astronomy  
As ether's stars will turn from flame to stone.  
Our thought squats in the starlight of our love :  
Cassandra shrieking flowers into stone.

Man alone, of all that die each day,  
Can count the petals floating from the rose.  
The drunken singers fall on tombs like stars  
That searched the air and took to sullen rows.

*U.S.A.*

### CATHERINE LYONS

#### *I Shall Wait*

I shall wait. Meanwhile shall watch your pleasure,  
Not intercepting smile or any treasure  
Of look and laugh and word with which you measure  
In careless multitude your preference.  
  
I shall profess a sort of ignorance  
As if I were not caught by inference  
  
That premises despair. I shall not cast  
One envious thought at her. All that is past  
  
Long since for smaller passion and you at last  
Are loved in wiser fashion. How much I cared  
  
For all your splendid ways shall not be heard  
Nor your love for her amaze my self prepared.

## IAIN Crichton Smith

### *O Honey Moon in Heaven*

O honey moon in heaven  
your heartbreak light recalls  
my making hands again  
to miracles of endeavour.  
Free from the sucking fever  
of heartblood spun in vain  
the tortured star, my fear,  
under your power lies  
in absolute delight,  
and all my shaking skies  
assume a calmer weather.

The boy I was on sand  
walking by the water  
in a bitter blow of wind  
becomes a lad of light  
golden from second sight.  
Time will not understand  
how memory can bring  
man and boy together  
in a rare weather  
of sea and shell and honey  
moon in heaven  
in heartbreak hour;

and time is right as always.  
For man to be adored  
puts off bone and flesh.  
The perfect profile must  
be stamped on coin, a ghost  
to whom our envy prays.  
Moon and running boy  
are coined in my heart's mint,  
to be touched when no sound  
from the house of reason shows  
all but the heart asleep.

## LAWRENCE LIPTON

### *The Dreaming Hands*

Walking high and moonwitched in  
A season of long nights I saw him—  
Deep his eyes and wonderful  
In motion and repose, his manner  
Mild, and quiet power in his  
Secret hands. I knew him then as  
One out of an unremembered  
Time, returning still half-hidden,  
Dreamed and on awakening only  
Half believed, and when he spoke his  
Speech was as the speech of mountains,  
Breathing with the glacial seasons  
Spaced eternities apart and  
Pulsing with all winged things,  
The fleet and million-footed herds  
And sea things moving oceans wide,  
His words were massive singing stones,  
His words were speaking megaliths.

Unshoe the foot, unbind the heart,  
The mind that chains the sun and fetters  
Mountain rivers to machines will  
Know no rest or peace until it  
Learns again the unremembered  
Speech of earth and seed and rain,  
Star and serpent fire and flower,  
Speech of mountains and the wonder  
Dreaming in those secret hands.

*U.S.A.*

## ANTHONY THWAITE

### *The Conjuror*

Matching conceit with its own countenance,  
The trick is second-nature to the hand;  
Notice the braggadocio of the stance,  
Concealing moves deliberately planned.

A throw of cards, a rabbit up his sleeve :  
Miraculous, you say, and you are right;  
Knowing him false, pretending to believe,  
You are yourself most darkly recondite.

And yet if he produced, with careless ease,  
The Second Coming from behind your ear  
Or moved a mountain with faith's subtleties  
Your features might reveal the sceptic's sneer.

Your cynicism would be justified  
Of course. There are impossibilities  
Which prove the sleeve was false, the patter lied :  
He was not paid for silly tricks like these.

## PHOEBE HESKETH

### *Integration*

The undertow is strong tonight, my love;  
Throughout the day my harnessed forces row  
Against the tide, but now the unsleeping flow  
Omnipotent has swept me to your-side.

My little boat, fragile among the reeds  
Of circumstance, created for the needs  
Of man to cross the straits of loneliness,  
Is tugged two ways; and I must ride the stress  
Where heart and head are crossed waves on the tide.

Face to the shore, I haul my will to land;  
There is no helm that reason cannot turn.  
Only the kick of a wave diverts my hand;  
Only the stab of a star can sting and burn  
Cold resolution to transcendent flame.

The will must rest; and now I am ashore,  
A Nothing upon a bank of sleep, whose soul  
Unknowing has drifted where itself is known.

## JON SILKIN

### *The Three Birds who were Saints*

Perhaps we should bury the three birds again  
We dug them up only for their red hearts.

We cut them out and we sewed up the bodies  
Now they lie in the open and their black feathers hurt my eyes.

Why did the king ask for their red hearts?  
I would have given him mine but to keep their flesh

Under the soil : someone says they are not dead.  
It is the crier whispering they sing still.

But the king has their red hearts in his black hand.  
Perhaps we should kill him. I do not say that.

I do not say three birds died for singing.  
I saw they opened their mouths as we went out marching

I say their singing could be heard over thousands of feet marching.  
And all for this the king had the birds killed

One Two Three, and their small red round hearts  
To stop the telling of them. But their holy song

Walks round and round on cunning voices.  
I lay my black hard life down to those birds.

## ELIZABETH BARTLETT

### *The Child is Charlotte*

Wish me out of this coma of fantasy  
Into which I have fallen, and lie  
Floating and submerged by turns,  
Pacing the paths with Charlotte  
In my arms. The die  
Is cast against me, the burns  
Wrinkle on my arms, the symbols  
Of all that may make or mar a child,  
And the child is Charlotte.

The drifting shawl severs the dead  
Twigs in the dream's edge, the forceps  
Fail, the blessings deceive us,  
All is broken and lost in the oncoming  
dusk, in the oncoming head.  
Who will receive us,  
When we are separate,  
After the pain has been ridden,  
After the incubus returns unbidden?

I have so little to give you,  
Only the tedious knot of pain,  
No sooner unravelled than knotted again,  
A faltering facility with words,  
A mountain from my molehill's feeling,  
A deft hand to spin your name  
In the fall of a peeling,  
No love, if my own love gutters and dies,  
And the darkness rushes in.

Paltry the gifts for Charlotte, no magi  
Travelling the interminable wastes  
For a new-born child, only  
Implacable genes, uncertain myrrh  
For so long a season. The lonely  
Gold is no reward for her,  
Death being no solution for a wayward child,  
Grown weary with waiting, grown wild  
With anguish; and the child is Charlotte.

All we have for the moulded head  
Enmeshed, is our own particular web  
Of mingling and unformulated beliefs,  
And the varying means by which we live,  
The blunt fingers on a recorder,  
The poetry written with difficulty  
Between supper and sleep, a retinue  
Of cats, to have and to keep, all  
Their nine lives, many-covered books  
Longed for, to suck and chew upon,  
Being nearest to hand, but forbidden  
Always.

Here is your bubble, my bountiful.  
Here is your room.  
Here to excrete and vomit and bloom  
Like a rose.  
Here is my womb,  
Clinically correct.  
I hope you may never know  
The reluctance  
Of this blossoming turmoil.

Who do we think we are, to engender this life,  
To set it stumbling forward, out into those passions  
Of fear and mistaken ecstasy, down darkening years,  
Reproachful, as we have been reproachful? Fashions  
Change, wars divide and split the world,  
Childhood is gone, the body buds and breaks,  
Blooms, deteriorates, trembles, grows old,  
Grows still, is bundled away, lies  
In a coffin covered with sacking  
On some remote railway platform.  
Who are we, to lie like gods on a cotton quilt,  
Listening to the spread of the rain through stem  
And root and layer of soil, and from the dregs of guilt  
And distaste bring forth this infant, this old woman,  
This child called Charlotte.

## REVIEWS

*The Death Bell* : Vernon Watkins (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

*English Morning* : Leonard Clark (Hutchinson, 10s. 6d.).

*Halcyon* : Rob Lyle (Hand & Flower Press, 4s.).

*The Eagle of Prometheus* : Joseph Chiari (Hand & Flower Press, 5s.).

*First Communion* : Chris Bjerknes (Olivant House, U.S.A., \$2.00).

Although this is his first book of original poetry since the publication of *The Lady with the Unicorn*, six years ago, admirers of the work of Mr. Watkins have multiplied in number over the past few years, thanks to the B.B.C. in general and the Third Programme in particular.

*The Death Bell* is a collection of poems and ballads, dividing the book into two sections, and it is in the ballads that the poet has made the greater advance. There are single lines, couplets and whole stanzas that remain in the memory, long after the book has been closed, like the tang of the seashore after a summer storm. At his best Mr. Watkins can write passages as elementarily simple and as powerfully direct as the waves that pound the rocks of his Welsh coast and that inspire so many of his themes. There is such a wealth of real poetry in the ballads that the division of the book into poems and ballads appears to be an unnecessarily pedantic device.

The poems in the first section read as a continuation of his previous volumes. The craftsmanship is as assured, the imagery as carefully selected and the melodic undercurrents as cunningly contrived. There are passages of great beauty, as in *The Turning of the Stars*, *Niobe*, and *The Strangled Prayer*, but there are other passages, fortunately few in number, that pass one by unnoticed, where the technique emasculates and the words tinkle tinnily in a sterile void. But such devitalized moments are rare in what is, by all accepted standards, a most notable collection and a worthy first choice for the Poetry Book Society.

“Poetry,” wrote Thomas Nashe, “is the Honey of all Flowers, the Quintessence of all Sciences, the Marrow of Art and the very Phrase of Angels.” Such a wonderfully comprehensive definition has little relevance to much of the poetry published over the past few decades. It is, therefore, with considerable delight that I read and re-read Mr. Leonard Clark’s collection, for if his poetry is not

altogether within the limits of Nashe's definition, it does tremble very happily on the brink. He is that type of poet whose work is often overlooked because it is in the main stream of English lyricism and, in a rather adulatory preface, Dr. Edith Sitwell draws the obvious connection in spirit between the best poetry in this book and the works of Clare and Traherne. In poems like *Song*, *The Wood*, *English Morning* and *The Walk* there is a clarity of vision and of joy that is "born of the morning of the world, of the innocent eye." But the most moving work in this collection is *Ultima Thule*, a poem in twelve parts, in which mysticism blends with an objective appraisal of nature to proclaim a living faith firmly rooted in experience.

Mr. Clark's poetry flows easily and fluently towards its lyrical fruition and when Mr. Rob Lyle allows his poetry to come through of its own accord, then he achieves passages of real beauty, as in *The Death of Aphrodite*. When he tries to startle and shock his readers, then the bloom on his poetry appears as cheap varnish and one's admiration degenerates into exasperation.

Mr. Joseph Chiari is a poet from whom, on the evidence of this collection, much can be expected. He has something to say and the technical ability to say it in the best possible way, but there is a bewildering anonymity about many of his poems. He has not yet discovered that vital spark that will turn mediocrity into excellence.

Mr. Chris Bjerknes is a North American versifier who, being drunk with words and lacking all powers of assimilation, only succeeds in churning out undigested gobs of sticky verbiage. When the paroxysm is over and he is emptied dry, then maybe he will write something worth reading.

B. EVAN OWEN.

*This Green Earth*: Arthur S. Bourinot (Carillon Poetry Chap-  
Books, Ontario, Canada).

*New Zealand Poetry Yearbook*, 1953: edited by Louis Johnson

(A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, New Zealand, 10s. 6d.).

Considering that Mr. Bourinot has published at least a dozen books of poetry, and belongs to the select band of Canadian poets who have won the Governor-General's Annual Award, it is more than a little surprising that his work is not better known in this country. The poems in his latest collection, *This Green Earth*, can

be divided into three main groups. First there are the descriptive pieces in which the poet makes skilful use of a painter's eye for colour and contrast, light and shade, and balanced settings, and the painter brings a poetic insight to bear upon his pictures (to judge by the frontispiece, a reproduction from one of the author's own oil paintings, Mr. Bourinot applies himself with ease to either medium). Then there are the various lyrics in which a simple, honest and humane philosophy is expressed. And finally there are the poems devoted to legend and folk lore, which include *The Death of Horned Owl* (an Indian legend), the Greek legends of *Nausicaa* and *Europa*, a new approach to the story of Abelard and Eloise, and a biblical theme, *Joseph, Brother of Christ*. Mr. Bourinot writes unpretentiously in an easy-flowing conversational idiom. He is perhaps at his best when he allows his imagination to play upon a given subject, or to create a symbolic character—that may explain why the poems of the third group seem to make a more decisive impact than the others, some of which, though pleasant enough in their way, are concerned with mere fragments of experience. Nevertheless, it would be unfortunate if this fact were to obscure the real qualities of pieces like *Winter Sketch* and *Brief*.

In the Introduction to the third volume in the *New Zealand Poetry Yearbook* series, Mr. Louis Johnson points out that the purpose of this annual selection is "revelatory rather than definitive—to show, year by year, that which is growing rather than that which is fully formed." One comes to the conclusion after reading this volume that the editor has performed his task extremely well or that the general standard of poetry in New Zealand at present must be consistently high. For though none of the poems can be said to reach the heights—and one would hardly expect that—few of them fail to justify their inclusion. And, once again, the younger poets make a good showing and exhibit almost as much skill and assurance as the established poets.

What, then, is revealed by the 1953 selection? Principally, that the New Zealanders, established and unestablished alike, are going through a phase of consolidation rather than of experiment, as if they were digging themselves in and improving their positions before attempting further advances. Although here and there one of them lets himself go for a moment in a swift creative flight, the emphasis is largely upon form, discipline and the precise communication of

ideas. The most exciting poet is the editor. But if there is any lack of adventurousness, the craftsmanship displayed throughout the whole volume commands one's admiration. Of the younger poets, Barry Mitcalfe, Colin Newbury, Henry Brennan, Jocelyn Henrici, Ngaire Outram Hogan, and C. K. Stead show rich potentiality. Among the older poets, Basil Dowling and W. Hart-Smith are disappointing and the most valuable contributions are made by James Baxter, Charles Brasch, J. R. Hervey, Robin Hyde and Louis Johnson. A special feature is Hubert Witheford's essay on the work of James Baxter, but whatever Mr. Witheford may have to say in criticism of Baxter's later poetry, there can be no doubt that *The Sirens* by James Baxter is by far the best poem in this year's harvest of New Zealand poetry.

ANTHONY NEWMAN.

*The Penguin Book of Modern Verse* : edited by Geoffrey Moore  
(Penguin Books, 3s. 6d.).

*Fugitive Sonnets* : Merrill Moore (Hand & Flower Press, 3s. 6d.).

*Tiger Moon* : Jessica Lewis (Falmouth Publishing House, U.S.A., \$2.50).

In making his selection of American poetry, Mr. Geoffrey Moore has, with but a single exception, confined his attention to the twentieth century. The exception is, of course, Emily Dickinson; for though this poet died in 1886 her work, which did not become generally known until after the First World War, was the first to express the modern outlook. Readers who are unacquainted with the recent developments in American poetry will be surprised to discover what a large number of excellent poets America has produced during the last fifty years.

To help such readers this volume contains an introductory survey of the whole scene and shrewd critical notes on the work of each poet represented. Mr. Moore distinguishes between the "Whitman" tradition, which, with "its free and virile cadences and pride of declamation, seems to reflect the vigour of the American spirit," and the "non-Whitman" tradition, a combination of the influences of Poe and Emily Dickinson; but this is merely to paint a clearer picture. If he lists the poets whose work falls, in one way or another, into either of these categories, it is not to suggest that any hard-and-fast classifications can be valid. And he emphasises the

fact that however they may have been influenced all these poets have developed their own styles and should be seen as individuals rather than as groups. The selection is an extremely comprehensive one, including such young poets as James Merrill, W. S. Merwin, Richard Wilbur, Howard Nemerov and Robert Horan, and can be thoroughly recommended.

Dr. Merrill Moore, one of the original members of the American Fugitive group, is reputed to have written over a hundred thousand sonnets, which must surely be a record for our own, if not for any age. The most striking thing about the mere 45 in this collection is that the author can still speak freely and easily in his own voice, without any suggestion of that sense of strain and working to rule, of being in a strait-jacket, which affects many of the poets who attempt the sonnet-form to-day; though the purist might complain that Dr. Merrill somewhat stretches the sonnet definition. Dr. Merrill is undoubtedly a skilful craftsman, and his poems are a pleasure to read.

In her first book, *Tiger Moon*, Miss Jessica Lewis tends to over-write and to get herself bogged down in her own lush verbiage; yet there are poems in this collection which, economical in imagery and simple in their expression, reflect a genuine talent. It may be that the publication of this volume will enable Miss Lewis to throw off the heavily-embroidered poetic mantle she insists upon wearing and allow her to be herself, to the benefit of her poetry.

CARLTON WILLIS.

*The Pot Geranium*: Norman Nicholson (Faber, 8s. 6d.).

*The Secret River*: Alan C. Brown (Fortune Press, 7s. 6d.).

*The Holy Stone*: Thomas Blackburn (Hand & Flower Press, 4s. 6d.).

*Thirty-Nine Preludes*: Laurence Clark (Villiers Poetry, 4s. 0d.).

*Eleven Scottish Poets 1954*: The Poet (Glasgow, 2s. 0d.).

*The Pot Geranium*, Mr. Norman Nicholson's latest book of poems, is recommended by The Poetry Book Society, and wisely so, for he is a poet whose work places him high above the usual run of contemporary poets. To mention his name is to call up a vision of Millom; to mention Millom is, for many, to remind themselves of Norman Nicholson, for like Stanley Spencer, Mr. Nicholson has become almost at one with the community in which

he lives, and further, again like Stanley Spencer, Mr. Nicholson uses his native locality as a setting for biblical incidents. Notice also how he sees the universal in the domestic particular, the connection between outer space and his own backyard :

"My ways are circumscribed, confined as a limpet  
To one small radius of rock; yet  
I eat the equator, breathe the sky, and carry  
The great white sun in the dirt of my finger nails."

There are many ingredients in his poetry, but the beginning of most of his journeys into creation appears to be, directly or indirectly, Millom or some place nearby. He is frequently journeying outward and then returning, beginning with a familiar everyday object and reaching to the sky or a far landscape of inner thought; or even bringing a distant object nearer by comparing it with something so well known as to be in danger of being disregarded, as in *Duddon Marsh* where he sees

"Twice a year the high tide sliding,  
Unwrapping like a roll of oil-cloth."

Mr. Norman Nicholson is our best regional poet, regional because of his continued adherence to South-West Cumberland, and because he takes most of his subject matter from that area, but there is a danger that we may lose sight of his proper position if we think too much of his regionalism. A careful reading of his poetry will reveal the depth of his thought and the amazing exactitude of his observations. Few poets have written so well about the industrial North of England as he has; probably only Auden has introduced as naturally the details of industrial landscape into poetry.

Another northern poet, Mr. Alan Brown of Newcastle, in his first book of poems, *The Secret River*, also uses industrial landscape as a subject for some of his poems, and though his poems lack the originality of Mr. Nicholson's, they do, nevertheless, suggest that he may develop into another good poet of the industrial North. The poems collected in *The Secret River* are varied in content and form, and reveal a fine technical ability which is given its best opportunity in the series of sonnets at the beginning of the book.

Mr. Thomas Blackburn should be well known to all readers of the little reviews. He is a poet much interested in the myth, and in this line produces worthwhile poetry. Reading his poems would

recall the work of Henry Treece were it not that Mr. Blackburn produces poetry which, for me at any rate, is far more valuable than the bulk of Treece's work. *The Holy Stone* is a book to be bought, read and cherished. It contains many very good poems and at least one brilliant one, *Intimations*.

Another interesting book is *Thirty-Nine Preludes* by Mr. Laurence Clark. Not as solid in poetic achievement as Blackburn's, it nevertheless deserves a bigger audience than that usually granted to books of poetry by little-known poets. The poems have been selected from at least twenty years' work and are the products of a poet with original talent.

A third book from the North, *Eleven Scottish Poets*, keeps up the high standard. The stars of the team are Sidney Tremayne, W. S. Graham and Burns Singer; the best poem, perhaps, *Virtuoso* by W. Price Turner. Well worth more than the two shillings asked for it.

ERIC NIXON.

*Life Arboreal* : Ewart Milne (Peter Russell, 9s. 6d.).

*The Gleam and the Dark*: Alexander Buist (George Ronald, 7s. 6d.).

Whatever may be said either in praise or in criticism of Mr. Ewart Milne's latest book (his eighth), it cannot be said that it is ever dull; even the least successful poems in this volume hold one's interest and compel one to read them again in spite of their flaws. And this is not because one's curiosity has been aroused by typographical and syntactical tricks, or by a snobbish appeal to the intellect. It is due entirely to the poet's unusual way of looking at life and of expressing his response. It would be quite impossible to lump him in with any group or school, which may explain why his poetry tends to be overlooked by the critics.

Mr. Milne's work stands alone, both in its virtues and defects. The first thing that strikes one about *Life Arboreal*, then, is the refreshing nature of the poet's vision, whether he takes his subject from the past, as in *The Brontë Passage* and *On a Distant Prospect of Parnell's Statue*, or deals with a contemporary problem, as he does in his admirable title-poem. His colloquial style allows his sense of humour to break through some of the most serious lines and his ironical vein to give edge to the points he brings out, so that his best poems preserve a curious balance between humour and irony, naivety and sophistication, realism and romanticism.

Another poet who has been content to work quietly on his own, regardless of fashionable movements, is Mr. Alexander Buist, who has been contributing to various magazines and periodicals for a number of years without attracting the attention his poetry deserves. Mr. Buist has a wide range and, being a sound craftsman, knows how to create the atmosphere in which his poems have their most subtle effect, but he lacks Mr. Milne's lightness of touch and casual use of language. The philosopher in him always carries the day, imparting a sobering quality to almost every mood. Such a confident serenity helps to restore one's perspective in these days of uncertainty and if, in *The Gleam and the Dark*, it rarely gives place to poetic high spirits or to verbal felicity for its own sake, neither does it concern itself with the inconsequential.

CHRISTOPHER MORGAN.

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#### THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND POETRY CIRCLE

The music and poetry gatherings which have been held for the last ten years at the Old Ethical Church, Bayswater, have been transferred under the above title to Stanton Coit House, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington High Street, W.8. Tea at 6.15 p.m. for 7 p.m. programme on the second Monday of every month from October to May every season as usual. Open to the public. Inquiries : Alec Craig, 5 Avenue House, Belsize Park Gardens, N.W.3.